

World War One memorials in the City of Melbourne

by Dr Michael Cathcart

For five terrible years following 1914, boys from all over Australia – the brave, the nervous, the brilliant and the dull of wit – marched off to fight in a European conflict. Some expected a glorious adventure – a noble battle against a demonic foe. Others enlisted because the ‘King’s shilling’ was too shiny a coin to resist. And some went, sick with fear, because soldiering was expected of them.

What they experienced was slaughter, a relentless chain of battles in which men were ripped apart by the new-fangled machines of death.

When the tireless guns finally fell silent on 11 November 1918, they left over 37 million corpses – civilian and military – on the battle fields of Europe. The human cost to Australia was beyond comprehension. From a population of fewer than five million, 416,809 men had enlisted. Over 60,000 were killed. Another 156,000 were wounded, gassed, or taken prisoner.

How was this young nation to make sense of so much suffering? Through the 1920s and 30s, communities, individuals and organisations erected monuments to the dead. These cenotaphs and statues were like so many Stations of the Cross – places for stillness and reflection – where stories of healing and hope could be told in place of a great horror which few could name. Here, the men who had been massacred were invested with honour and dignity. They were elevated as ‘the fallen’; the men who made ‘the ultimate sacrifice’; ‘the glorious dead’.

In the monuments which Australians erected, no one story of the war dominates to the exclusion of all others. But, as the monuments in the City of Melbourne show, what all shared was a sense, not of triumph, but of profound sadness.

Parkville Diggers’ Memorial



World War I Memorial
Royal Parade, Parkville

The most common type of Anzac memorial features a simple statue of a soldier of the Australian Imperial Forces (a 'digger' or 'Anzac') standing on a plinth. Some of these diggers stand with head-bowed, as if in mourning. Others look out towards the rising sun with eternal hope in their eyes. And some, like the young soldier on the Parkville memorial are almost casual, a young citizen-soldier standing easy, with his rifle butt resting on the ground.

This is a public memorial. But it is also an expression of one man's private grief. As the inscription on the granite steps shows, the structure is the work of a monumental mason named Morgan Jageurs. The name of his eldest son, John, appears among the names of the fallen soldiers. Both father and son were Irish Catholics. According to the common wisdom, neither man should be named here at all.

In the 1920s, most Australians were loyal supporters of the Empire. It was only by thinking of Australia as the larrikin child of Britain that these grieving families were able to make sense of the carnage of Gallipoli and the Somme. If their boys had not died for the Empire, then their deaths had been a grotesque waste: for many Australians that interpretation of the war was unthinkable or treasonous.

And so it was that, when the Lord Mayor William Brunton unveiled this memorial in 1929, he told the assembled crowd that these men 'had given their lives in order that their children might live under the freedom of the British flag'. He was talking about the Union Jack.

In Melbourne, that account of the war had been long been challenged by many Irish Catholics, led by their single-minded archbishop, Daniel Mannix. In 1917, Mannix denounced the conflict as 'a sordid trade war': a slaughter of the innocents engineered by the greedy captains of British business. To most-British-Australians, this was the talk of a traitor and in the mainstream media his opponents were baying for Mannix to be deported or jailed.¹

In Melbourne, Morgan Jageurs was well known as another defiant advocate of the Irish cause. He was well-connected within the Catholic Church. But this is where the story of this monument becomes both complex and poignant. Morgan was a follower of the moderate Irish nationalist leader, John Redman and his so-called constitutional party. Like Redman, Morgan was a supporter of the principle of Irish self-government *within* the Empire, a position which was sometimes referred to as 'Dominion home rule'. Unlike Mannix, Morgan supported the war.

Young John Jageurs shared his father's loyalties and joined the thousands of young Australian men who enlisted in the first AIF.

In July 1916, his division was ordered to attack the German lines near the French village of Pozières. John was one of the thousands of Australians who were slaughtered during that two week battle. Not even the deaths on Gallipoli matched the carnage of this engagement. As the historian C E W Bean later wrote, the Pozières ridge 'is more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth.'

When Morgan built this monument, he listed John's name under the heading 'Corporals'. John's workmate and friend Austin Mahoney (another Irish name) won the Military Cross and was promoted to captain. He was killed in France in the final weeks of the war. His name, too, is here.

A metal plaque below the names declares: 'We died for Country; live ye for it'. That was the point. Those deaths had to count for something.

¹ Advertiser [Adelaide], 9 May 1918, p.4

Nurse Cavell



Nurse Edith Cavell Memorial
Margaret Baskerville, 1926
Marble bust with cast-bronze panels on granite pedestal

Kings Domain,
Birdwood Ave

Today, many Australians talk about the Anzacs as if they were patriotic nationalists. In fact, the Australian federation was just 14-years-old at the outbreak of the war, and the war itself kindled Australia's enthusiasm for the Empire. Melbourne's monument to an English nurse named Edith Cavell was an affirmation of that sense of kinship.

In 1914, Cavell was the matron of a school for nurses in Belgium. At the outbreak of war, she started in nursing wounded soldiers from both sides. But after the German occupation of Belgium in November that year, Cavell began sheltering Allied troops and assisting their escape to neutral Holland.

Nine months later, the German authorities charged her with treason. At her trial, Cavell was defiantly truthful about her activities: she offered no defence. The court followed the letter of German law and sentenced her to the mandatory sentence. On 12 October 1915, she was executed by firing squad. The night before her death she told her chaplain, 'Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness for anyone.' Those words, reproduced on the plinth of this monument, became her epitaph.

Through the Empire, she became a heroic example of the moral superiority of the British race. Although she was aged 49, newspaper stories and postcards depicted her as a youthful maiden who had been murdered by the Hun.

Within a month of her death, the idea for a memorial was circulating among the leading women of Melbourne society. Mrs Annie Robinson, the wife of the powerful conservative state politician Arthur Robinson, hailed Miss Cavell as 'a modern Joan of Arc' and declared that a statue would have 'great effect on the morals of future generations'.²

Patriotic Victorians promised 26,000 pounds – more than twice the sum required to create a really grand memorial. But time passed and the actual funds were less than that, and a more modest edifice is the result.

The acclaimed Melbourne sculptor Margaret Baskerville carved a marble bust of Nurse Cavell gazing defiantly into the distance. On the pedestal, Baskerville placed four bronze reliefs, illustrating scenes of Cavell's life and execution.

² *Argus*, 11 November 1915, p. 6

The memorial was unveiled on Remembrance Day 1926 on the western side of St Kilda Road near Princes Bridge. Until the 1970s, it was the centrepiece of ceremonies to commemorate the war service of nurses. It is one of just a handful of First World War monuments around the world to depict a woman and it resonates with similar memorials of Cavell across the Empire, most notably a grand, full length statue in St Martin's Place in London, topped by the word 'Humanity'.

The Melbourne memorial was moved to its present location in 1962, to make way for the National Gallery of Victoria.

The Driver and wipers



Drivers and Wipers Memorial
Charles Sargeant Jagger, 1937

Birdwood Avenue, Shrine Reserve

Most of the soldiers depicted on Australian war memorials are benign, noble or melancholy figures. The two bronze statues, Wipers and the Driver are, by contrast, savage creatures of war.

They are the work of a noted English sculptor named Charles Sargeant Jagger. Jagger was born in a tough Yorkshire mining village and studied sculpture at the nearby Sheffield Art School and later at the Royal College of Art in London. He served with the British Army at Gallipoli and in France and was awarded the Military Cross. In 1922, Jagger was commissioned to create a memorial to the Royal Artillery. The result is an imposing stone monument which looms over Hyde Park Corner in London, featuring a massive stone Howitzer gun surrounded by four figures, of whom the Driver is one. The Melbourne statue is a recasting of that original.

His companion in Melbourne is a grim infantryman standing guard with .303 rifle. He is a duplicate of a figure on a war memorial at Hoylake in Merseyside. 'Wipers' was the mischievous way in the British and Australian soldiers mispronounced the battle-scarred village of Ypres in northern France.

To some viewers, they are representations of men engaged in the stark realities of battle. To others, they are stereotyped and dehumanised creatures – as sterile as any propaganda produced in the 1930s by the Russians or, a little later, by the Nazis. Either way, they leave the viewer in no doubt about the human cost of the conflict.

The statues were unveiled in February 1937 on either side of the lawns at the front of the State Library in Swanston Street. (In those days, this venerable building was also the home of the National Gallery of Victoria which owns the works.) In 1998 they were moved to the Shrine Reserve where they now keep watch back-to-back.

North and West Melbourne Red Cross Memorial



Red Cross war memorial
Errol Street, North Melbourne

The Empire theme was played out on Sunday 11 July 1926, when thousands of school children massed around a simple monument, erected by the local committee of the Red Cross at the city end of Errol Street in North Melbourne. On the arrival of the Governor and Lady Somers, the children gave a mighty patriotic cheer.

It was fitting, said Lord Somers, that as the representative of the old mother country he should be given the privilege of taking an active part in this service of commemoration. 'Who in a greater degree than a mother feels that pride and gratitude at the way her sons rallied round her in the time of her greatest need? The name Anzac is carved deeply in the old mother's heart,' he declared. And then he led the children in a kind of prayer. 'For those who mourn a personal loss we pray that their memories of past happiness, their just pride in the achievements of their dead, and the possession of our deepest sympathy, may lighten the burden of their grief and bring them peace.'

Unlike most local war memorials, this one does not list the dead. It is simply dedicated to 'the 520 soldiers of the district who fell during the Great War.' They died, says the inscription, 'in the cause of freedom'.

In the particularly bitter federal election campaign of December 1931, a British winner of the Victoria Cross named Issy Smith, held a political rally here, in his attempt to win the seat of Melbourne for the conservative United Australia Party. Like many political meetings that year, the gathering descended into fighting between supporters of the left and the right.. Eggs, meant for the candidate, smashed against the granite pillar of the memorial. The memorial was undamaged but Issy failed to win the seat.

Oarsmen's Cenotaph



Oarsmen's Cenotaph
Alexandra Gardens

In Melbourne, all sorts of organisations erected monuments to the members of their community who been killed – there were honour boards, stained-glass windows, books of memory, in schools, churches, community organisations and sporting clubs throughout the city. One of the most striking of these is the Oarsmen's Cenotaph which bears the names of 316 Victorian rowers who died.

The memorial stands on the banks of the Yarra overlooking the Henley landing, a wharf named after the site of the famous annual boat races between Oxford and Cambridge universities. This is no accident. The sport of rowing, like cricket, was invested by well-to-do Melburnians with moral qualities thought to typify an English gentleman. It was (and remains) an especially prestigious sport at Victoria's elite private schools (known, in the perverse English style, as 'public schools'). When the First World War broke out, the members of the Victorian Rowing Association numbered 2117 men. More than half enlisted.

Among the members of the prestigious Melbourne University Boating Club whose names are listed on this cenotaph, there are three men with the surname Campbell. Each of them died with the promise of an extraordinary life ahead of him.

Captain S J Campbell had been a talented athlete at the exclusive Geelong Grammar school before he studied medicine at the University where he became captain of boats. He was a doctor with the Army Medical Corps at Gallipoli where he was killed.

Neil Leslie ('Les') Campbell was dux of Geelong College in 1911, where the principal Norman Morrison remembered him as 'the brightest pupil I have ever known'. At the University, Neil lived up to this reputation – both as an elite athlete and as a prize-winning scholar. He enlisted in the AIF in 1915. But, like so many of his fellow public schoolboys, he aspired to be recognised as an Englishman, and so he switched to the British Army. He was killed in action on the Gallipoli peninsula on 8 August that year.

Colin Richard Campbell shared Les' British aspirations. When the war broke out, Colin was a resident of the University's privileged Trinity College. Having completed his second year of Law, he sailed to England and enlisted in the Highland Light Infantry. He was killed in Mesopotamia on 11 January 1917.

This fine memorial was constructed in 1924 by the Victorian Rowing Association. It is topped by a stone vessel which represents both a rowing trophy and a funeral urn, as if, in dying, these young men have won a loftier prize. In 1980, the urn and other parts of the memorial were damaged by vandals. The structure has now been restored to its original condition.

Simpson and his Donkey



Man with a Donkey (aka Private Simpson and His Little Donkey)

Wallace Anderson, 1935
Cast bronze statue on granite pedestal

West forecourt, Shrine of Remembrance

John Simpson Kirkpatrick came from the other end of the social scale – and he is the most famous, and most unlikely, Anzac of them all. He was born in 1892 in County Durham in England. Following in the wake of his father, the nuggetty young man joined the merchant navy, but the ocean life was not to his liking and in 1910 he jumped ship in New South Wales. For the next four years, John worked as a cane-cutter, rouseabout and miner and a seaman on the coastal shipping routes. At the outbreak of the war, the Englishman enlisted in the AIF as 'John Simpson', believing that the Australian army would send him home to Britain.

Instead the army assigned him to the medical corps and shipped him to Turkey. On 25 April 1915, he was one of the men who crossed into Australian legend when they landed at dawn on the beach we now call Anzac Cove. Simpson soon teamed up with a Turkish donkey which he named Duffy (some reports say he called him Murphy or Abdul). In the chaos and fury of the battle, the easy-going Englishman became a familiar figure, carrying wounded men from the cliff tops down to the safety of the beach. He maintained his life-saving mission for less than a month. On 19 May, he was shot dead through the heart.

When the Anzacs began returning to Australia, they told the story of the man with the donkey. Simpson became the subject of newspaper editorials, school essays and speeches on Anzac Day. To diggers he was the embodiment of virtue – a little man doing good amid the awful fury of the war. The historical man became lost in allegory: he was, in effect, every ambulance man on Gallipoli. He was, if you like, a secular Christ.

On 18 October 1933, an Anzac calling himself Quinn's Post wrote to the Melbourne *Argus*, urging the AIF to erect a memorial to this heroic private. 'Simpson is the embodiment of true sacrifice,' the digger declared. 'In the years to come it is to be assumed that statues of generals will surround the Shrine. Why should they and they alone, be so honoured?' This suggestion aroused enormous enthusiasm in Melbourne and the *Argus* newspaper launched an appeal.

This was the depths of the depression: the Simpson fund gathered just 400 pounds – many of the donors describing themselves as the mothers, sisters, wives or widows of soldiers. It was too little to pay for a life-size sculpture. Instead, the artist Wallace Anderson designed the small bronze statue which now stands alongside the Shrine – a delicate memorial to a man who laid down his life, not in the attempt to kill his enemy, but in a determination to save his fellow men.

General Sir John Monash on horseback



Sir John Monash
William Leslie Bowles, 1950

Bronze statue on granite plinth
Kings Domain, cnr Government
House Dr & Birdwood Ave

At the same time, the Melbourne establishment was planning a memorial to General John Monash, who had recently died. By contrast with the appeal for Simpson, their fund raised 10,000 pounds – sufficient to erect a life-size equestrian statue. General Sir John Monash was a soldier of humanitarian temperament and liberal views. In a war when many of senior officers, on both sides of the trenches, seemed aristocratically indifferent to the lives of their men, Monash was promoted on merit and actually knew what he was doing. His promotion was opposed by many who were unwilling to see a man of German and Jewish heritage exercise such authority. But, on this occasion, skill triumphed over prejudice. In the age of mechanisation, Monash pioneered the effective use of aircraft and artillery to protect the infantry, and he refused to subordinate his own good sense to the will of British commanders. A civil engineer by training, Monash returned home from the war to become, first the Director-General of Repatriation and Demobilisation, and then the highly effective head of the rapidly expanding State Electricity Commission of Victoria. He was also vice-chancellor of the University of Melbourne, a position he held from 1923 until his death eight years later.

Calls for a Monash memorial began almost immediately after he died. Prominent Melburnians, including his former staff officer Thomas Blamey, formed a Monash Memorial Committee and announced that they would raise £10,000 for a statue of the general on horseback. Given that Monash had made his name as a commander of infantry, the decision to reinvent him as a horseman was – as several commentators pointed out at the time – deeply anachronistic. But the committee wanted a memorial fitting of a hero – and to their minds, the most heroic statue in Melbourne was the memorial to the Marquis of Linlithgow which stands further down the Government House drive on the corner of St Kilda Road. That was the very thing: they would order another, just like it.

The task of designing the memorial went to a war veteran named William Bowles, a technically skilled sculptor with resolutely conventional views about art. But where to put it? The original plans for the Shrine had provided for two such equestrian statues on either side of the northern portal. But by 1937, the Shrine's trustees had decreed that no memorials to individuals should be erected in the immediate vicinity of the Shrine

itself. No exception was made for Monash, despite the fact that he had overseen the planning for the Shrine. So it was that this site, near the entrance to Government House, was chosen. There is a double irony to this location. Firstly, the statue of Simpson and his donkey, a memorial to an individual who was neither a soldier nor an Australian, now stands in the immediate shadow of the Shrine. Secondly, Monash sits atop his unaccustomed horse immediately along-side a statue which shows General Blamey standing in the front of a much more appropriate jeep (Blamey having become the commander of the Australian army during the Second World War).

In retrospect, it is disappointing that this dynamic and imaginative man should have been consigned to such a conventional and derivative piece of work. But Monash has other memorials in this city. A premier university now bears his name. And every time the lights go on, Melburnians might spare a thought for the civil engineer who did so much to build their city's electricity system.

Tom's block

The first Anniversary of Anzac Day was marked by a service at Westminster Abbey in London and by services of commemoration and what the Argus called 'quiet observances' in cities across Australia.

In Melbourne, that afternoon, a group of dignitaries and returned Anzacs gathered in the King's Domain near the Boer War memorial to plant trees in an area now known as Tom's Block. The ceremony was begun by the acting Prime Minister Senator George Pearce, who planted a West Australian flowering gum. He told the gathering that 'the memory of the gallant men who fell at Gallipoli would remain fragrant in the minds of their people, not only of Australia but of the whole Empire. Australia was richer and nobler, because of their deeds.'

Mrs G H James (on behalf of the Overseas Club which had convened the occasion) and Mrs Eliza Pearce both planted wattles. The Lady Mayoress Lizzie Hennessy, a skilled linguist, musician and society hostess, planted a Gippsland mahogany gum. The commander of Australia's 6th Battalion at Gallipoli Brigadier-General Walter McNicoll planted another West Australian gum amidst enthusiastic cheers from the assembled soldiers. The Anzacs themselves then planted further trees in memory of the comrades they had left behind.

A memorial to silence



Edward George Honey Memorial

Stone boulder with bronze and aluminium plaque, 1965

Kings Domain, Birdwood Ave

But perhaps there is no more poignant memorial than that two minutes of silence – when people stop and reflect – and repeat those heart-rending words, 'We will remember them.'

That silence was erected in our culture – in our traditions – largely thanks to the effort of a gentle and thoughtful man named Edward Honey. He was born in Melbourne in 1885. When the war broke out, he was an unemployed journalist, married and living in London. He enlisted in the army but was soon discharged on account of his frail health. In the months that followed, Honey travelled around England and saw men – wounded in mind and body – returning from the front. He was distressed by their suffering and sickened by the war profiteers who were so keen to stoke the engines of death. When the war ended with fireworks and a great patriotic ‘hullaballo’, Honey fell into a deep despair. As he told his wife, the men who had suffered or died deserved a more fitting memorial than all this ‘hideous noise’. In May 1919, he wrote a letter to the London *Evening News* in which he proposed ‘a silent tribute to these mighty dead’. He wanted just ‘five silent minutes of national remembrance. A very sacred intercession.’

The idea of a period of silent reflection was not new. As Honey himself observed, in 1910 Britain had stood still for five minutes to mark the death of Edward VII. Honey’s proposal was that this should become the universal memorial for the common soldier. His idea won the support of powerbrokers in Whitehall and of George V. After a rehearsal with Grenadier Guards, which Honey attended at the invitation of the king, the authorities decided that five minutes was too long. On 7 November 1919, the king sent out a message declaring that, on Remembrance Day, he would like people throughout the Empire to observe two minutes silence.

Honey died of tuberculosis in Middlesex in 1922. He was 36. His widow, Millicent moved to Melbourne where she lobbied for some recognition of his contribution. She outlived him by over forty years. In 1965, her wish was granted, a crowd gathered on Birdwood Avenue for the unveiling of a simple memorial – a humble pile of stones with a plaque – to the man who gave us silence.

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